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ABSTRACT

The Ohio Program of Intensive English, a version of English for Specific Purposes, is described. The English for Specific Purposes program strives to make international students conscious of cultural differences. Often the students are axious to continue their study of science and technology and have little interest in language per se. However, these non-native speakers should become acquainted with the American thought process, rhetorical patterns, and manners. On way to accomplish this is to use video segments of professors presenting topics in the specific area of academic interest. Before taped lecturers are viewed, a brief, preview of the lecture's format and content is given. The video approach presents technical idioms, intellectual language, and accompanying readings that stimulate the technical interests of the students while teaching listening and speaking skills. Students are encouraged to formulate and express their opinions on the effectiveness of the lectures. (RW)

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DEVELOPING THE LISTENING SPEAKING COMPONENT IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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Today, before discussing our topic, Effective materials for English for academic purposes, and more specifically for Science and Technology, it is necessary to give some background on why the Ohio Program of Intensive English has moved in this direction.

With the increasing interest in English for Specific Purposes in this country, in 1981 OPIE undertook a needs analysis for Ohio University which, one can say, is an obvious but often overlooked corrolary. Carried out by Robert Dakin and Patrick Kelley, it was hoped that through this systematic language-use needs questionnaire, international students - especially at the advanced level could be better prepared for academic work. Two such studies prior to the one at Ohio University are John at San Diego (1981) and the detailed study at George Washington University (1981).

At Ohio University, two questionnaires - one for faculty and a second for students were distributed. The topics were language related but also dealt with classroom organization, course structure, and testing as well. The 40% return response by the students to this 7 page questionnaire was, indeed, gratifying. Included in the handout is the analysis of the first part of the data. Table I provides information on the respondees. Approximately 60% were undergraduates and 40% graduate students. Major language and culture groupings were Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese.

In the first four items of the questionnaire, students were asked to rank the major language skills in order of importance. The responses paralleled conclusions of previous research that listening and reading are the most important academic skills.

It is interesting to note that while listening was considered to be one of the most important skills, students claimed to have little problems in this area, yet at the same time, they expressed difficulties in understanding spoken instructions and taking notes from lectures - both of which are the more advanced forms of listening skills.

In the area of reading, while ranking this as an important skill, students did

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not consider reading to be a problem, yet vocabulary was considered to be a major obstacle. Speaking was not considered to be very important but students were concerned with when and how to interrupt a professor. Here again, the students perception of these skills was very elementary.

An ensuing study in the area of business administration by Kelley and Mickelson (1982) showed that students found textbooks to be very complicated. They were frustrated at not being able to memorize materials and were unable to relate particular facts and bits of information to the understanding of the larger picture. If information was not found in a single sentence, it was missed. Furthermore, premature hypothesis before finishing an entire section and looking for contextual changes was a common problem.

If one were to take the responses to the questionnaire at face value, one would immediately set about constructing vocabulary lists of language specific materials, drill on listening to instructions and outlining. However, while ESL teachers cannot claim to be experts in science or business, neither can the L2 student be expected to analyze and understand specific needs. Rather, the needs seem to be very similar to what Schmidt and others have identified to be the problems of non-native speakers in note taking and reading as well.

1. The inability to perceive the relationship between parts and the whole - this can include graphs and charts as well as allusions in both reading and listening/speaking.

2. The inability to distinguish between important and unimportant information - or primary and secondary facts.

3. Inability to understand what relevance examples have in discourse.

4. Ignorance and misunderstandings of discourse markers at every level.

5. Lack of comprehension of various rhetorical forms.

Finally, it must be noted that responses from the faculty questionnaires indicated that even those students exempted from English had difficulty in academic areas

outside of math in the area of Listening and Speaking. This was especially true of graduate students and upper level undergraduates (juniors and seniors) who were to the point of beginning to specialize.

The question then is "Is the problem one of need for practice in the second language or are there underlying cultural factors and need for self-motivation that must be addressed?"

Anxious to study their "major", science and technology, students have little interest in language and are for the most part, unaware of the cultural differences in approach to academics in their country and the United States. Furthermore, in many cases one may question if some of these students understand what they are studying. When asked why they are studying engineering, a very common response is "so that they can go back, help their father, and live a comfortable life."

Looking at Science and Technology from the professional point of view, a study carried out by the American Society for Engineering Education in 1979 states that clarity of expression and the ability to communicate are essential in the field. While the audience with whom the students are going to communicate may change from scholarly to real, the need for effective language remains.

The first factor, then, in our English for Specific Purposes is to make the students conscious of cultural differences. Understanding Academic Lectures (Prentice-Hall, 1983) has an excellent series of lectures describing different learning patterns in various parts of the world. Using this entire book would preclude moving into an ESP program (but, by the way, for a strictly advanced L/S and notetaking text it is the best on the market). Assignment of individual area-appropriate lectures to students to listen and discuss with the members of the class is a very relevant exercise. This is also an excellent icebreaker as far as making the members of the class feel comfortable with each other. Combined with the activity is the classroom presentation of what is expected in an American academic system (the necessity to read, to listen, to participate, to interact and to formulate one's own conclusions) students become aware of the differences from memorizing entire texts or sets of notes or taking only one exam a year as several examples.

Classroom discussion on this topic gives the teacher the ideal opportunity to evaluate individual problems of comprehension, articulation, stress and syntax. Individual work with laboratory tapes and student-teacher conferences on a weekly basis proves to be the most successful manner of maintaining self-esteem and high student motivation.

In addition to understanding what is expected of the students in the American classroom, non-native speakers must be familiar with and understand the American thought process as compared with their own as well as American rhetorical patterns and manners. A very helpful text in this respect is Listening and Notetaking by Virginia Yates. While not an ESL text, the first part of the book is a very systematic and self-explanatory approach to notetaking and recognition of main and supporting ideas. Since the taped material takes the students step by step through each part, students can work through the exercises and are encouraged to go back and re-listen if their answers do not agree with the corrections. The fact that this is carried out on an individual rather than class exercise I find helpful. Students are not under any type of peer pressure to perform, and will take the time to go back and correct. One young man, handing in a perfect paper had obviously just copied down answers. I asked him if this was the case and he concurred. It was an excellent opportunity to re-establish the self-motivation factor - it was not for me that any of them were doing this. Which as we go along you will see works into my philosophy on grading.

With the foundation of understanding about the process of American education and headed on an individual approval in notetaking and pronunciation, students are then ready to approach the language specific skills of an ESP program . . . preparing and improving their communicative skills.

You will notice that reading is used with L/S. This is because the success of both listening and reading carry a need for learning to guess unknowns from the context of information. Students must learn to read in "chunks" (Eskey) and they must learn to listen to phrases, latching on to key words. Failure to do this is where students tend to blame all problems on vocabulary. One might state that according to Eskey (1983) students learning a second languge are suffering from a comprehension gap in one or more areas -- linguistic, pragmatic or cultural. Also because students lack confidence in processing a second language, they fail to

develop an adequate background -- to develop a schema.

It has been noted that many of the prepared texts in the area of L/S contain topics for interaction by students and have as a main goal social interaction. (Brown 1978) This cannot be considered adequate background or proper training for the academic setting. Rather students need materials which will enhance not only their cognitive understanding but will improve their ability to recognize rhetorical markers, understand digressions and allusions. Such exercises force students to practice the art of "Predicting" (Brown, 1978) rather than giving up because they don't understand every word.

The use of video segments of professors in the specific area of academic interest in advanced L/S classes has proven to be an excellent means of presentation of topics. With the constant bombardment of idioms, intellectual language, accompanying readings, one can construct a topical mini-course, promoting students self-esteem in participating in adult-like discussions. I contacted various members of the faculty of engineering and science about specific possible topics and the possibility of making a video tape of a 20 minute lecture.

The taping was done in the television recording studios to assure quality acoustics and lighting. Speakers were given no information on format. When talking to the perspective speakers, they were encouraging them to procede in the same manner as if they were giving a normal lecture. As a result, we have a variety of approaches -- just as one might find in different classes -- some lectures are very organized, others very disorganized, some graphically oriented, others not. Some speak to the blackboard -- a real shock for non-native speakers looking for any cue he can hold on to. The one factor, then, does shine through and I think an excellent orientation to the American system is the congeniality of the speakers. The taped lectures provide a framework for vocabulary readings, discussion and oral presentations of the course. We are not concerned with in depth learning of topics per se, but rather the manner of processing the materials into a useful format and enriching the students' cognitive reserve. I mention this because it is not uncommon to hear of non-native speakers spending entire academic terms studying textbooks of a subject in preparation for taking it the following quarter.

For each lecture, students are given an introduction to new vocabulary of the

taped lecture. Exercises on synonyms, antonyms, and different forms of the same root give students the opportunity to verbalize and lend attention to pronunciation and stress patterns. This is important, not only for their speaking skills but also for their reading process as well. Especially evident is the use of figurative and informal expressions. It is these informal expressions that are the true barrier to comprehension both in reading and listening. For students who continue to feel unsure of the pronunciation of words used in class, tape is available in the listening lab for individual review.

While classroom time is used to work with the lectures, vocabulary, discussion, students are assigned outside readings (housed in the reserve room of the library) to increase their exposure to technical reading - Scientific America, Hi Technology, Omni, in addition to journal articles. Here again it is not a matter of thoroughly digesting each reading but process. In-class reading instruction deals with topical material, but emphasizes timed reading, skills of scanning exercises on referents and comprehension. Materials from the Nucleus series by Longman and the Listening and Comprehension Series by Newbury House are a good start for in-class technical materials.

Furthermore, students must be taught how to read professional journal articles. Since they are written for a very specific audience, there is no need for a lengthy forward and summary. Usually, they go from a generalization to data to support that the facts presented are valid and to suggest that previous results should be questioned. Once again, it is giving the students the format from which to speak that is important.

A very helpful exercise in terms of overall performance when reading is once the reading has been done in class under timed conditions, students are then asked to outline for main and supporting ideas. This is an excellent means of evaluation to ascertain comprehension as well as reinforcing notetaking skills.

At all points, with taped lectures and with the reading, general questions on the topic are raised with the hopes that as more information is gathered that they will continue to question their topic and change their ideas to incorporate information and ideas to which they have been exposed. Question and discussion always point to the fact that developing the necessity that for any generalization,

proof or adequate support is expected.

Before any taped lectures are viewed, a short formal lecture is given to the students to give a preview of the format and content of the lecture. While this will be a bit slower than the lecture itself, there is no attempt to repeat or talk at an unnatural slow pace. At the conclusion of this introductory lecture, a short quiz is given with the students being allowed to use the notes which they have taken to answer the questions. This is not for a grade; rather it serves as a motivator to see where work is needed on notetaking skills and understanding the important information. Following the quiz, an outline of the material is shown on an overhead projector to point out main points and serve as a model for the notes. If time remains questions are asked to again allow students to integrate yet more material into their answers. This practice of posing the same questions encourages the students to begin to categorize material and use it.

It is at this point in the listening that the actual video is presented. If the pace of the lecture is too fast, students are encouraged to listen . . . leave space, use question marks where they are not certain of the content. If the audio proves to be beyond their speed of comprehension, they are encouraged to listen to their own copy of the audio which is made while they are listening to the video in the language laboratory. They can reduce the speed by 10% by listening to the tape in the language lab. If this is still too fast they may borrow a reduced speed tape. Students are alerted that the speed alteration causes a lower voice and some distortion. However, listening to this prevents them from only listening to several words, stopping the tape, copying down the entire text as they go. [TAPE]

I would like to digress just a bi· here to say that the language lab as a teaching classroom is an excellent place to have students work on the audio. While they are working, the teacher is free to walk around and see how successful they are in their notetaking activities.

The question may be raised here as to why bother to use video tapes? Why not just audio portions such as in the Newbury House or Longman Series? First of all, it is a mroe realistic simulation of what the student is going to experience in a real classroom . . . as I noted before, the teacher with his back to the class, the paralinguistic features which signal the end of thought patterns, the oral editing

that no prepared lecture will produce . . . in other words, it is very real communication.

Another point is that listening is, indeed, work and watching while listening seems to be a positive motivator to sticking with the task rather than tuning out the lecturer. It is not a situation of a teacher being a focal point playing a tape unrelated to the teacher's presence.

Students are encouraged to formulate and express their opinion on the effectiveness of the lectures. Was the professor clear: Did he give enough information to adequately clarify his points? Did he digress to the point of interfering with the topic of the lecture? What questions did you write on the second half of your page to ask the professor?

Some may question the advisability of insisting on a particular style of notetaking. It matters litle to me if students use roman numerals, capitals, etc. However, they must use a consistent system. I encourage short cuts with the use of a limited number of abbreviation, but I do not encourage abbreviations to such an extent that it becomes a private form of shorthand that has to be transcribed.

Students are encouraged to use only half the page for notes, reserving the other side for personal questions that arise as well as notes from texts and readings. This method has proven itself to be extremely helpful to students in both English for Advanced Notetaking and ESP.

At the beginning of the term, lecture notetaking is aided by giving rhetorical markers and key words so that students have some guidelines as to where they should be in the lecture. As the term progresses, fewer and fewer markers are given. Following the lecture -- discussion, worksheets, panels for stimulating the class.

Finally, one additional exercise is the preparation of five minute speeches on a reading. This may be specified to be for a general or specific audience. The students present the five minute speech in front of the class and they are videotaped. They are given the opportunity to view the tape privately and are most intrigued with what they said and how they presented their material. This is

another motivator for self-improvement without the trauma of peer pressure.

As can be seen, a great deal of the burden of this course is on self-motivation. Grading must be in terms of improvement rather than an average of performance. I prefer to use a numerical scale of 54321 for oral performance; check, check minus and check plus for lab work and percentage only on quizzes to see that their comprehension skills are improving.